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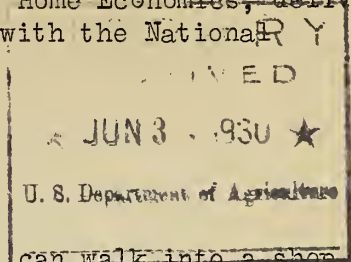
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BUYING GARMENTS THAT FIT

A radio talk by Miss Ruth O'Brien, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered through WRC and 34 other radio stations associated with the National R Y Broadcasting Station, Friday, June 13, 1930.



Maybe you are one of the fortunate women who ~~can walk into a shop~~ and walk out in a few moments clothed in a new well-fitting garment that has required no alteration. If so you are lucky. You are also a very rare person, if the letters received by the Bureau of Home Economics are any indication. From the word we get from women who are trying to buy or make garments that fit themselves or their children, the matter of correct sizes for both garments and patterns is getting to be a very serious one.

No one realizes this more than the manufacturers themselves. A number of conferences of ready-to-wear and pattern manufacturers have been held during the past few years to see what could be done about it. After listening in on a few of these some of us began to wonder where these sets of measurements now accepted as representing so-called perfect figures really came from.

We had always had the idea that at some time great numbers of people had been measured and the results classified so that the hip, waist, and other measurements of a garment labeled size 36 really represented the measurements of the great majority of women of that size. We began to make some inquiries about this and would you believe it, we have found that no such studies have ever been made.

Some manufacturers will say, that they check their measurements on perfect figures every once in a while but when questioned closer as to just who decides what are perfect figures, the answers get very vague and hazy. Some have told us that the army and insurance records are the basis for the sizes of men's ready-to-wear clothing. Since we are afflicted with a big hump of curiosity we went back through all the army and insurance records available and found a great many measurements of height and weight and chest circumference. But that was all. In fact, as far as a diligent search has revealed there are (with one exception) no published records of a truly scientific study of the body measurements necessary for making clothes or patterns.

This one exception is the work done by the War Department as the army was being demobilized at the end of the World War. At that time, there were still vivid recollections of the troubles they had had in getting well fitting uniforms. With that in mind, the measurements of a great many men were taken so that if it were ever necessary to clothe another draft army, sizes for the uniforms would be available. However, these measurements were taken for the standardized army uniform and do not include all that are necessary for civilian clothing.

Apparently what has really happened is that the manufacturers, hard put to it, have had to call in small groups of people who looked average, and measure them. Their set of proportions were then labelled perfect 36's



and 38's and so on and a few inches added here or subtracted there to get proportions for thin people or fat ones. In other words, many of the measurements have been made with a lead pencil and nothing else. The same seems to have happened in the case of children's clothing. We have started to keep account of all the mothers who tell us their children are so well developed that they wear garments made for children 2 or 3 or 4 years older. We have about decided that all ready-to-wear clothing for children is at least 2 sizes too small. But as one merchant said philosophically, "Well it makes the parents happy to think their children are large for their age." We have also been forced to the conclusion that many of the measurements now used have been inherited from a dim and distant past. No one knows just where they came from. But the fact that they are old makes them greatly respected anyway.

It is all rather funny if it were not so serious to the woman who must return garments that are too small or spend a great deal of time and money refitting garments or trying to fit herself or her children with patterns. That such a higgely-piggelly system should have grown up in this efficient, business-like country of ours is strange, to say the least. The Bureau of Home Economics has recently published a little pamphlet on the subject and hopes that the next step will soon be taken -- namely, a really scientific study of the body measurements of large groups of people. It must include, not the measurements commonly taken by scientists interested only in body growth, but those needed for clothing construction. These measurements must be made not with stretchy tape lines and in the casual manner of the clerk or the tailor but by using accurate measuring instruments and definite body landmarks. There is a science of body measurements called anthropometry and the methods adopted by specialists in that field should be applied to this problem -- but they must be applied by some one who knows what is needed in clothing construction.

